

Message Text

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11

ACTION EUR-12

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LONDON PLS POUCH TO BELFAST

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TAGS: PBOR, PINT, EI

SUBJECT: FITZGERALD HINTS AT CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

1. DAIL DEBATE ON NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION AGAINST GOVT HAS PRODUCED ONE NEW DEVELOPMENT: FIONA FITZGERALD HINTED ON OCTOBER 24 THAT GOVT MIGHT TRY TO REFORM CONSTITUTION EVEN WITHOUT CONSENT OF OPPOSITION FIANNA FAIL PARTY. SINCE FITZGERALD HAS A REPUTATION FOR CHOOSING HIS WORDS CAREFULLY, HIS HINT CAUSED A STIR ON OPPOSITION BENCHES. THERE ARE SEVERAL SECTARIAN PROVISIONS IN CONSTITUTION WHICH REFORMISTS HAVE LONG WANTED TO CHANGE, BUT CONTROVERSY CENTERS ON ARTICLES 2 AND 3, WHICH ASSERT CLAIM OVER VI IN A WAY OBJECTIONABLE TO PROTESTANTS. FITZGERALD ADMITTED THAT IF OPPOSITION OPPOSED REFORM, GOVT WOULD HAVE TO FACE DANGER OF A DEFEAT IN ANY CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM. SUCH A DEFEAT COULD MAKE SITUATION EVEN WORSE. NEVERTHELESS, GOVT MIGHT FIND IT NECESSARY TO GO AHEAD WITH CHANGE.

2. IT IS NOW OPEN SECRET THAT FIANNA FAIL HAS PREVENTED ANY MAJOR MOVEMENT IN ALL-PARTY DAIL COMMITTEE FOR CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE. LEADING FIANNA FAIL OBSTRUCTIONIST IS BELIEVED TO BE DUPUTY VIVION DE VALERA, SON OF EX-PM WHO DRAFTED EXISTING CONSTITUTION.

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SEVERAL OTHERS IN FIANNA FAIL, HOWEVER, HAVE ALSO APPEARED RESIST-

ANT TO CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE, EVN THOUGH OPPOSITION LEADER
JACK LYNCH SEEMS PERSONALLY FLEXIBLE.

3. SHORTLY AFTER FITZGERALD SPOKE IN DAIL, DEBATE MEDIA CARRIED
RESULTS OF ONE OF IRELAND'S RARE PUBLIC OPINION POOLS (REPORTED
IN MORE DETAIL IN SEPTTEL). THEY MUST HAVE BEEN DISCOURAGING TO
FITZGERALD: 51 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS SAID THEY WOULD VOTE TO RE-
TAIN ARTICLES 2 AND E, WHILE ANLY 11 PERCENT WOULD SUPPORT REPEAL.

4. ONE OTHER ITEM IN DAIL DEBATE HAS BEEN NEWSWORTHY, THOUGH NOT
NEW. ON OCTOBER 24, PM COSGRAVE REITERATED GOVT'S LONGSTANDING
COMMITMENT TO POWER-SHARING IN NI, & TO "ENDURING POLITICAL ARR-
ANGEMENTS TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WHICH EXISTS
BETWEEN THE TWO PARTS OF IRELAND." THIS IS, IN FACT, A Milder
VERSION OF "IRISH DIMENSION" THAN THE COUNCIL OF IRELAND WHICH WAS
TRIED UNDER SUNNINGDALE AGREEMENT. COSGRAVE COULD NOT HAVE SAID
MUCH LESS IN ANY STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD. INDEED, MOST OBSERVERS
AGREE THAT NOTHING LESS COULD CONCEIVABLY FORM BASIS FOR A POL-
ITICAL SOLUTION TO IRISH TROUBLES. NEVERTHELESS, NI LOYALIST
LEADERS BLASTED COSGRAVE'S STATEMENT, & IAN PAISLEY CALLED FOR
A BOYCOTT OF ALL GOODS FROM SOUTH. IDEA OF BOYCOTT IS NOT TAKEN
SERIOUSLY--EXCEPT AS A DEMONSTRATION OF EXTENT TO WHICH NI
SITUATION HAS BEEN RADICALIZED.

5. COMMENT: CONTACTS CLOSE TO FITZGERALD TOLD US MONTHS AGO THAT
GOI REFORMISTS WERE DRAFTING NEW CONSTITUTION AND THAT SOME IN
GOVT WERE INCLINED TOWARD BOLD STEP OF CALLING CONSTITUTIONAL
REFERENDUM EVEN IF FINNA FAIL PROVED OBSTRUCTIVE. FITZGERALD HAS
NOW OPENLY CONFIRMED THIS LINE OF THINKING. PM COSGRAVE HAS BEEN
TYPICALLY SILENT, AND NO ONE CLAIMS TO KNOW WHAT HE THINKS. IT IS
HARD TO BELIEVE THAT HE WOULD TRY A REFERENDUM WITHOUT SUPPORT FROM
ALL MAJOR PARTIES. IN OTHER STEPS SINCE TAKING OFFICE, COSGRAVE HAS
BEEN EXTREMELY CONSERVATIVE AND CAUTIOUS. A RISKY CONSTITUTIONAL
REFERENDUM WOULD SEEM OUT OF CHARACTER. FURTHER, EVEN THOSE MORE
INTERESTED IN REFORM THAN COSGRAVE WILL BE WORRIED ABOUT LOSING A
REFERENDUM AND THEREBY WORSENING NORTH-SOUTH TENSION.
MOORE

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